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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
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Thesis

The Biographical Methods of Lytton Strachey

By
Mary Imelda Dwyer
(B. S. Ed., Boston University 1930)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
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I Introduction

A. The Prevailing Interest in Biography

"The cult of the hero is as old as mankind", says André Maurois,[1] and, if this is so, the prevailing interest in biography is but a part of an age-old interest that had its source in man's innate curiosity about his fellow-man, and especially about his fellow-man whose deeds have made him conspicuous. "Man's curiosity about his fellow-man is perennially insatiable. To satisfy it, the department of biography has swollen to gigantic proportions."[2] We are assured, furthermore, that there always will be interest in biography as long as humanity is dominated by forcefulness or led by charm, and so long as there are great figures to fascinate by personality.[3]

There is still another aspect to the present interest. Upon closer inspection it will be found to be consistent with the history of English biography in that it is a part of the rise and fall due to the ebb and flow of public interest in human personality with its taste for psychology. Periods of deep religious feeling and interest in the eternal verities produce a deductive and ethical biography not too appealing to the popular taste. Periods of speculation, doubt, and scepticism have an interest in human behavior and the mundane verities, and produce a biography that is critical, detached, realistic, and pop-

(1) "Aspects of Biography", Andre Maurois, p.204
(2) "New Modes in Biography", James Truslow Adams, p.257
(3) "The Biographer and His Victims", Claude M. Fuess, p.73

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ular.[1] None can deny the scepticism, doubt, and irreligion of the present age. We may accept this condition as suggestive of the causes of the present taste.

B. A Brief Review of the Biography of the Past

Biography had its origin in the commemorative instinct, the desire on the part of the ancients to defy annihilation. Plutarch led the way when he set before himself the task "of writing the lives of famous persons" and "of comparing the lives of the greatest men with one another".[1]

Although the beginnings of biography in the British Isles were bound up with the history of the Christian Church, its ancestry may be traced to the runic inscriptions which celebrated the lives of the heroes whose glories were sung in the sagas and epics of the very early periods. "Beowulf", "Widsith", "Deor", "The Wanderer", and "The Wife's Complaint" all have within them the elements that helped to form the biographical impulse.[2] It was the impetus which the Church gave to the writing of the lives of its heroes, however, that was responsible for the great number of works that made their appearance before the thirteenth century, and that may be considered as the starting point of English biography. For the most part these belong to hagiography, and contain so much extravagant praise and emphasis on the miraculous side of the religious character

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From 1200 to 1500 there was little biographical work. The fourteenth century saw a great interest in romance with a corresponding decline of interest in facts.(1) Roper's "Life of Sir Thomas More" and "The Life of Wolsey" by Cavendish, both in the sixteenth century, deserve special mention because, although imbued with the old commemorative spirit and marred by no small portion of didacticism, they shifted the centre of interest to the individual not as a type but as a man.

The modern period began with Johnson and Boswell, both of whom wrote in the eighteenth century, and each of whom seemed to develop in his own way a biography that was different from the panegyric of the past. The former with "The Life of Savage" (1744) and the latter with "The Life of Johnson" (1791) inaugurated methods, which, with variations, have been followed by all successful biographers since their day.

(1) "The Development of English Biography", Nicolson, p.24-25

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C. The Biographical Method a Distinct Process

The Oxford Dictionary has the following definition: "Biography is the history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature", a definition that implies historical accuracy, truth, material dealing with the individual, and treatment as a work of art." (1) "Art is concerned with a picture of reality sufficiently removed from us to relieve us of the desire to do something, and at the same time directed by a human will". (2) As art, biography must be selective, analytic, and interpretive, but not creative in the sense of permitting invention and allowing the author's personality to interpose. (3)

The biographer must first choose the individual life that he wishes to portray, and in this he must act carefully as not all lives respond equally well to the biographical touch. "No great biography can be written

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Having chosen a subject, the biographer must become saturated with it, and develop for it a sympathy that will enable him to put himself in the place of the individual whose personality he is portraying. He must be a psychoanalyst, a diagnostician, a seer, and a judge with qualities of sensitiveness, discernment, discrimination, and shrewdness.(2) Different biographers use their material differently. Sometimes they give a definite analysis of certain characteristics. Sometimes personality is made to stand out by a long series of narrative developments so skilfully composed as to bring out the right point in proper proportion. Selection of details is of prime importance.(3)

"The material", after selection, "must be fused, transfigured, and glorified by the imaginative intellect of the artist working with the instrument we call style." (3) Here, again, the individual talent of the writer does its work with successful or unsuccessful results. All of which leads us to believe that it is almost as difficult "to write a good life as to lead one," (4) despite the increasing number of biographies that are appearing every year.

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(2) "The Biographer and His Victims", C. Fuess - Atlantic Monthly, Jan. 1932, p. 62-73
(3) "Art of Biography", G. Bradford, Sat. Rev. Lit., May 23, 1925, p. 769
(4) "Eminent Victorians", Strachey, Preface p. VI.

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As yet there is no real literature on the biographical method as a literary art, and many writers are beginning to feel that there should be. The epic, the lyric, the drama, the novel, and the essay are all esthetically idiosyncratic. It is time that such an important and prolific field should become so.(1)

D. The "New" Biographical Method Compared with the Old

Because there is prevalent an idea that the biographies that were written a generation ago are essentially different in method from those of the present time, we hear of the modern product as the "new" biography. Many students of the art take exception to this terminology and none more emphatically than James Truslow Adams, the historian. He says in substance:(1)

There is nothing really "new" in the modern biography. The methods of selection and the emphasis are

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There are two lines of different methods in the practice of the art. One is traditional, follows Plutarch and his school, and has for its purpose to incite its readers to emulate the lives portrayed. This line produced most examples a generation ago. The other branch follows Suetonius. Its purpose is to transmit personality. Many of today's biographies belong to this school. The real question is one of validity of methods and of standards.

To "transmit personality" raises the question, "What is personality?" Plutarch's school had its characteristics of the "fine and the good" pretty well decided for its writers, but the followers of Suetonius must decide, "What is man?" and, "What elements must be selected from the mass of material to picture 'man'?" It is here that they dodge the issue and pick out those elements in which the character departs from the accepted "mores" not only of his time but also the accepted "mores" of today. The picture is apt to be distorted and to show a lack of proportion as a result of this selection.

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A competent biographer must think out a philosophy of man and of nature before he can select his details. Once selected, they should not be treated as a medical case as has happened so often recently. Many current biographies show a love of the episodic on the part of the author, with a consequent selection of subjects with a vast collection of gossipy episodes. The tendency to be "psychic" and to delve into the sub-conscious has given us still another variation of the same theme.

Is the modern biography more interesting than its predecessor? If sales at the book stores and applications at the libraries are any indication, we answer, "Yes", while bearing in mind the characteristics of the present age which, as we have shown, are of such a nature as to find pleasure in the modern product.

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A. Strachey, the Man as an Influence Upon his Writings

Giles Lytton Strachey was born in England March 1, 1880, the son of Sir Richard Strachey, British general and Indian administrator, and Lady Jane Strachey, herself an author and considered one of the most brilliant women of her generation in England.(1) His family was well-known in army and government circles, and, in the natural order of things, Strachey should have been a soldier, a judge, or a provincial governor, but generations of ingrowing respectability and patriotism blossomed forth a critic and a biographer.(2) St. Joe Strachey, the author of the London"Spectator" was his cousin. Of his five sisters and three brothers, the following appear in "Who's Who": a sister, J. P. Strachey, principal of Newnham College, Cambridge; Philippa Strachey, secretary of the London Society for Women's Service; and Colonel Richard Strachey.(1)

His college work was done at Cambridge. In his group were E. M. Forster, John M. Keynes, and Clive Bell. The Don was George E. Moore, whose philosophy in "Principia Ethica" was known as "Bloomsbury". After graduation, he and his friends talked, read, went to France, and looked at pictures. There was no hurry, no

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economic pressure in their lives. There was leisure to study, to think, and to arrive at conclusions. They were philosophically minded and regarded nothing as true unless there was good reason for believing it to be true. The war caught them just as they were about to begin. Strachey was a conscientious objector so he saw no fighting. (1)

After the war, he settled at 51 Gordon Square near Stephens, Clive Bell, John M. Keynes, Lydia Lopokova, Vanessa Bell, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, and E. M. Forster. The neighborhood was known as "Bloomsbury". It was group-conscious and became the butt of some ill-natured jibes. Philosophically, it demanded that any problem be exactly stated at the outset. The attainment of probability was regarded as difficult, the attainment of certainty as impossible. Good in itself was indefinable; good results were the criteria for practical goods. The highest good was personal affection and esthetic enjoyment. (2) The effect of Strachey's amazing critical intelligence was apparent in the work of the members of this group. He said little, but that little was to the point, and his influence was felt. (3)

He never married. His death occurred January 21, 1932, and as Vincent Sheean says, "Bloomsbury can never be so coherent again." (3)

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His was an astonishing personality, that displayed remarkable maturity even when he appeared at Trinity. Long after he had left, his college mates talked in a "Stracheyesque"[1] voice, high-pitched and flute-like, "a thin glass-tube of a voice."[2] His appearance was unusual and his physique almost grotesque, yet he was "an endearing oddity"[3]. "A gaunt, long gentleman"[4], very pale, with heavy spectacles and a red beard of considerable length, his portrait by Henry Lamb in the Tate Gallery, London, is a striking piece of work.

As a host, he was charming, kindly, and intensely amusing, but reserved toward those not in his immediate circle. He admired but felt uncomfortable in the presence of men of action. He was gentle, scholarly, urbane, and, despite his writings, a little sentimental. He lived singularly removed from the rough and tumble of everyday life and liked nothing better, when engaged in writing, than to retire to the country to get away from what he called "the exits and entrances"[5].

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(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Living Age, July 21, 1923, p.126
(5) Living Authors, p.390

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(2) Ibid.
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(4) Living Age, July 21, 1923, p.126
(5) Living Authors, p.200

B. Strachey, the Writer.

Strachey's fame as a writer rests upon a comparatively few books, not more than seven at the most. His output was small and his field limited. While in college, he wrote some poetry after the manner of many others who later turned to prose as their instrument of expression. Following his graduation, and continuing up to the time of his death, he contributed occasionally to the monthly and quarterly reviews. These contributions began in 1903, and an unfinished paper on "Othello" dated 1931 was found among his effects after his death. Many of these articles he himself collected and published in two books. The first, "Books and Characters", appeared in 1922. It is composed of fifteen papers, more than half of which deal with French characters. The second, "Portraits in Miniature" was published in 1931. As the title suggests it contains small pictures, cleverly drawn, with English characters, for the most part, as subjects.

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1. 1905-1912. During this time his interest was chiefly in French literature. He was writing many of the papers which appeared later in "Books and Characters". In 1912 he published his first book, "Landmarks in French Literature." With this publication he became the leading English critic of that field.

2. 1913-1915. Literary biography and the Age of Voltaire were occupying his mind during these years. No books were published, but it is reasonable to believe that he was gathering much of the material that he used in his later biographies.

3. 1915-1932. In 1918 appeared his first biography "Eminent Victorians". Then followed "Queen Victoria", 1921; "Books and Characters", 1922; "Elizabeth and Essex", 1928; and "Portraits in Miniature", 1931. "Characters and Commentaries" was published posthumously in 1933. With the exception of a few prefaces and similar works that have little bearing on the subject at hand, this is the extent of his literary efforts - a slender foundation for a considerable reputation.

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This soon followed. "Queen Victoria" made its appearance and was read with avidity by those who delighted in the brilliance and the irony of the previous book. This time, however, they saw a strange thing happen--an author conquered by his subject. Strachey came to ridicule but remained, if not to pray, at least to be softened by what he found in the character of this simple and somewhat dull woman who was the center of an age the very antithesis of what he thought worth while. The character of Victoria grew on him until in the end we find an almost sympathetic treatment and the first evidences of a touch of the sentimentality that his friend

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"Elizabeth and Essex" did not appear until seven years later. On this occasion he forsook the Victorian for that other great age in English history dominated by a woman--the Age of Elizabeth. It was not Elizabeth, the queen, the heroine of many a strategic battle, that interested him, nor Elizabeth, the center of one of the greatest ages in literature, although no fairly accurate characterization could omit these phases entirely--but Elizabeth, the woman, the cause of much speculation and the subject of many a gossipy story. That was "the certain fragment of the truth" that "took his fancy",(2) and this time there was no softening.

Of the other books, I have already made mention briefly and will leave any further discussion of them until analyzing the methods used in their development.

Strachey's writings were and are popular. Making a direct effort to profit by the weaknesses of their predecessors, his books hold their own in competition with the prose fiction of the book stalls. "At the opening, of what has been called 'The Jazz Age', he catered

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C. His Biographical Technique

1. As he himself saw it

Immediately following the World War, a period in which so much that had been previously revered was destroyed, there appeared, as a comparatively new prose writer, Strachey with his "Eminent Victorians". Whether or not, as some think, he looked upon himself as an innovator in the biographical field, he felt the need of setting forth his principles, and he used the preface of this, his first biography, for the purpose. We can do no better than to quote him:

"It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict that singular epic, The Victorian Age . If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank or the rear; he will shoot a sudden revealing searchlight into obscure recesses hitherto undivined. He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen from those far depths to be examined with a careful curiosity."(1)

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"The art of biography seems to have fallen on evil times in England. We have had, it is true, a few masterpieces, but we have never had, like the French, a great biographical tradition.....With us, the most delicate and humane of all branches of the art of writing has been relegated to the journeymen of letters; we do not reflect that it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one. Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead--who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment of design?"(2)

He closes in this manner:

"To preserve, for instance a becoming brevity--a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant--that surely is the first duty of the biographer. The second, no less surely, is to maintain his own freedom of spirit. It is not his business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them. That is what I have aimed at in this book--to lay bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions. To quote the words of a Master--'Je n'impose rien; Je ne propose rien; j'expose.'"(1)

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This preface with its fine rhetorical effects created almost as much stir in England as that which followed in the book itself. It was a "shock attack" aimed at the immediate past and was the opening wedge to show his belief that the industrial, democratic, Protestant, middle class world was a comedown from Queen Elizabeth, from Racine, and even from Voltaire.(1) "When one considers the great souls of the past, the present seems dreary and vulgar--the Victorian Age in particular, for all its extraordinary energy, was an insult to the human spirit."(2)

Such was his thesis, and the facts which he laid bare and "the certain fragments of the truth" which "took his fancy" to"elucidate"(3) were all chosen with this thought in mind. He stripped forever of their solemn upholstery the religion, the education, the statemanship,

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and the philanthropy of the society that had brought it about.[1] It was a method new to England, but well known in France. Strachey may have thought that by introducing it to his native land he was laying the foundation for "a great biographical tradition"[2] the counterpart of the one he admired so much in France.

2. His method of characterization

The literary contribution of Mr. Strachey, though limited in quantity, is the result of selecting and sifting a great mass of details to produce characters that move in an aura of the author's choosing. The ultimate quality is atmosphere, definable to the extent that we can refer to the "solid vitality of Victoria", "the romantic charlatanism of Disraeli", "the conscientiousness of Albert."[3] They stand out as personalities to be noticed and remembered whether they appeal to the taste of the individual reader or not.

A survey of his characters will show that they easily fall into major and minor groups. He chose two queens, symbols of two of the greatest ages of English life---Elizabeth and Victoria. The former he threw against a background of intrigue, passion, and procrastination. With her he associated the Earl of Essex, Sir Walter

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(2) Preface to #Eminent Victorians", p.vi
(3) The Living Age, July 21, 1923, p. 129

The results of standardization were checked with p-nitrosaniline which had been checked against sodium nitrite and were described as agreeing "closely". They show, as did the work of Knight, that ferrous ammonium sulfate gives a small error as a primary standard. The real disadvantage lies in the instability of the solution. This fault can be overcome, however, by the apparatus of Kimti and Reinacker (1) whose exponent in this country is G. Frederick Smith of the University of Illinois. Smith has shown ferrous sulfate solutions to be stable when stored under hydrogen in this apparatus.

Kolthoff and Tomicek (2) found the chief impurity in the commercial solutions to be iron as did Kneobt. They found it desirable to have iron free material for potentiometric work and they used the method of Polidori mentioned above for purification. They found the preparation of Kahlbaum to be very nearly iron free. That of LaMotte was not as good, but was satisfactory. It cost nearly ten times as much as the Kahlbaum preparation (in Europe). Hacobm commercial samples were not satisfactory.

Satisfactory standardization of titanous chloride solutions (3) was accomplished electrometrically using pure potassium dichromate, potassium ferricyanide, and ferric alum.

(1) Kimti and Reinacker, Z. anorg. allgem. Chem., 155, 84, (1926)
(2) I. M. Kolthoff and O. Tomicek, Rec., trav. Chim., 43, 768-779 (1924)
(3) I. M. Kolthoff and O. Tomicek, ibid.

The potassium dichromate was obtained pure by crystallizing the commercial salt from water several times and drying at 180 degrees. Kolthoff has shown that a salt of very high purity can be obtained in this manner. The titration of the titanous solution with dichromate works well except at times the end-point is slow and behaves peculiarly. (1) Potassium ferricyanide was recrystallized repeatedly from water and after air drying, was carefully heated to 100 degrees. Zintl raises the objection to using it as a standard that it is not stable in solution. The results of Kolthoff and Tomicek seem to show slight decomposition. The ferric alum was recrystallized from water rapidly twice and dried over a liquid sugar-sodium chloride mixture whose vapor tension was about 70 %. Solutions of 0.05 M and 0.1 M were prepared by weight. They were in 0.4 N sulfuric acid. The results agreed fairly closely with those of the dichromate. Zintl (2) points out that the salt soon changes its water of hydration appreciably and certainly is too difficult to prepare pure for use in the standardization. In order to get consistent results and an end-point which was satisfactory, Kolthoff and Tomicek introduce a little copper sulfate near the end-point of the titration. This should be corrected for because the cupric copper is reduced to the cuprous state.

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Raleigh, the Bacons, the Cecils, and Philip of Spain. The latter emerges in the company of Melbourne, Albert, Disraeli, and Gladstone.

The Victorians designated as "eminent" have been mentioned before: Cardinal Manning, Dr. Arnold, Florence Nightingale, and General Gordon. Racine, Voltaire, Mme Du Deffand, Rousseau, Henri Beyle, the President de Brosses, the Abbé Morellet, and Mme de Lieven are an indication of his interests in the French field. Frederick the Great, Shakespear, Johnson, Boswell, Sir John Harington, Lady Hester Stanhope, Dr. Thomas Beddoes, and Mr. Creevy--the known and the little known--are neither too great nor too insignificant to escape his brilliant touch.

A closer survey of these groups of characters will show that the period of time included extends from the Age of Elizabeth to that of Victoria. Edmund Wilson points out that "Portraits in Miniature" well illustrates this:

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The time span is thus represented:

16th century - Sir John Harington of the Court of Elizabeth

17th century - An amateur scientist - John Aubrey

A classical scholar - Dr. North

An ambitious university don - Dr. Colbatch

18th century - A French magistrate - the President de Brosses

A French abbe who consorted with philosophers - The Abbé Morellet

A country gentleman who insisted on his rights - James Boswell

A lady of sensibility - Mary Berry

They end with Mmde Lieven, "whose surrender to middle class Guizot marks for Strachey the final capitulation of the magnificent aristocratic qualities of Queen Elizabeth."(1)

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Lytton Strachey's choice of feminine characters was interesting. His attitude toward women was peculiar. He was fascinated by their psychology without feeling any of their attraction, and rather took pleasure in seeing them humiliated. It has been pointed out that he almost invariably picked unappetizing feminine subjects and seemed to make them more unappetizing still.(1) With this statement I am inclined to take exception. Granted the unattractive results at times, at least some of his women characters - Florence Nightingale, for example - were not unappetizing in themselves.

Again it has been said that Strachey chose characters that by their very natures were meant to be found out--a statement which implies that there was much that was unfavorable to be found out about them. And again I raise the objection that there is bound to be a great deal that is unfavorable even in the highest types, and that it is a matter of selection and rejection of incident and detail that determines the finished picture.

Having made his selection of subjects, what did Strachey do with his characters? From the huge mass of details that might be given on almost any of the personages, he had the problem, as has been said of selecting and rejecting--"he must select and reject the material

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which supported his conception and reject that which might raise a doubt of its accuracy."(1) In other words, despite an air of detachment and impersonality, his method, as he himself gave it, demanded a preconception of his subjects. "If he had before him a score of letters, he must choose therefrom the paragraph, the sentence, the phrase which conveyed the desired impression... Everything depended on the accuracy of the interpretation of his subject's character, and that accuracy depended in turn -- at least negatively -- on his freedom from prejudice and prepossessions."(1)

The old biography was satisfied to look at a man's acts and did not bother much about his motives. Strachey wished to probe deeper and expose the inner workings of his mind. To do this he must resort to psychology and must go outside the field of biography to get a method and a model. John Galsworthy had been doing this same thing in the novel and with conspicous success. Strachey took over this "stream of consciousness" technique, as it was called, and soon was equally skillful with it. "Here is a typical instance. The aged Cardinal Manning would often delve into his scrap-books filled with newspaper clippings concerning himself over a period of thirty years. Animosity toward his detractors would stir within him. And then he would suddenly begin to

(1) The Catholic World, April 1932, p.59

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doubt. After all, where was he? Had any of it been worth while? Had he not been out of the world all his life? Out of the world!"(1)

Probably the most quoted example of this practice pictures the mind of the dying Victoria:

"Yet, perhaps, in the secret chambers of consciousness, she had her thoughts, too. Perhaps her fading mind called up once more the shadows of the past to float before it, and retraced, for the last time, the vanished visions of that long history -- passing back and back, through the cloud of years, to older and ever older memories -- to the spring woods at Osborne, so full of primroses for Lord Beaconsfield -- to Lord Palmerston's queer clothes and high demeanour, and Albert's face under the green lamp, and Albert's first stag at Balmoral, and Albert in his blue and silver uniform, and the Baron coming in through a doorway, and Lord M. dreaming at Windsor with the rooks cawing in the elm-trees, and the Archbishop of Canterbury on his knees in the dawn, and the old King's turkey-cock ejaculations, and Uncle Leopold's soft voice at Claremont, and Lehzen with the globes, and her mother's feathers sweeping down towards her, and a great old repeater-watch of her father's in its tortoise-shell case, and a yellow rug, and some friendly flounces of sprigged muslin, and the trees and the grass of Kensington."(2)

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Strachey was fond of contrast in the development of his characters. He liked to play them off against each other. Notice Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex: "On the one hand a queen, on the other a subject; she selfish, old, and ugly, he generous, young, and handsome; she with brain dominating heart, he with heart dominating brain; she coldly unspiritual, he knowing moments of spiritual exaltation; in the event, she the powerful sovereign determined to wreak vengeance, he the impotent subject beaten in the game of cat and mouse."(1)

The point of view which the author adopted toward Prince Albert in "Queen Victoria" caused considerable surprise at the time of its publication. At all times a more or less unpopular figure in England, Mr. Strachey handled him almost affectionately, but here again we have contrast. "Queen Victoria's middle-class complacency sharpens the tragedy of the Prince Consort's eagerness for a life of action in the arena of politics, and the frustration of his great ambition becomes the more poignant in the face of his minor successes..... Finally, is implied on every page, as the grand 'motif', the contrast between the majesty of the British empire and the commonplaceness of the plump, domestic little woman who embodied it."(2)

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to present from a background of genuine research an historical figure or event in a way that was at once creative and imaginative. The chief aim was to present a figure as living before our eyes."(1) Certainly an excellent ideal.

It is not necessary to read far in "Elizabeth and Essex" to find the key in which the character of Elizabeth is to be written. "It was plain to all -- the handsome, charming youth, with his open manner, his boyish spirits, his words and looks of adoration, and his tall figure, and his exquisite hands, and the auburn hair on his head, that bent so gently downwards, had fascinated Elizabeth.....The Queen and the Earl of Essex were never apart. She was fifty-three, and he was not yet twenty: a dangerous concatenation of ages."(2) The dominant note had been sounded and was to echo and re-echo through the book.

We next get a glimpse of the Queen's character: "While the Spanish ambassador declared that ten thousand devils possessed her, the ordinary Englishman saw in King Hal's full-blooded daughter a Queen after his own heart. She swore; she spat; she struck with her fist when she was angry; she roared with laughter when she was amused. And she was often amused. A radiant atmosphere of humour coloured and softened the harsh lines of her destiny, and buoyed her up along the zigzags of her dreadful path.

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Her response to every stimulus was immediate and rich: to the folly of the moment, to the clash and horror of great events, her soul leapt out with a vivacity, an abandonment, a complete awareness of the situation, which made her, which makes her still, a fascinating spectacle."(1)

Strachey then goes a step farther and tries to explain the contrasts in the character of this "rough hectoring dame" by an analysis of the causes of her "neurotic condition". In so doing he introduces elements that have been termed indecent and more fittingly used in a medical discussion. This tendency toward indelicacy is seen in many more details, for example the De Maisse incident,(2) and there is cause to wonder whether or not this quality was a prime consideration in the author's mind when choosing his details.

The rivalry between Sir Walter Raleigh and Essex is again a rivalry for the favor of Elizabeth as a woman. The long series of requests which Essex made for himself or for his friends was refused for personal reasons depending on the whims of the Queen.

Some one has said that Strachey exalted Elizabeth's inability to make a decision into a genius. Whether true or not, he certainly emphasized this exasperating quality in her: "To put the day of decision off--and off--and off--it seemed her only object, and her life

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passed in a passion of postponement."[1] And again in speaking of the Dr. Lopez affair: "The Queen hesitated more than usual before she allowed the sentences to be carried into execution."[2] Only the final condemnation of Essex seemed to be an exception: "And so it happened that this was the one occasion in her life on which Elizabeth hardly hesitated. The trial had taken place on February the nineteenth, and the execution was set for the twenty-fifth. A little wavering there had indeed to be -- she would not have been Elizabeth without it; but it was hardly perceptible."[3]

Under Strachey's hand Elizabeth's character is simplified while seeming to grow more complex. A single line from Tennyson sums it up: "This way and that dividing the swift mind."[4] It cannot be denied, however, that much good that might be said about her has been left out. There is little or no hint of the great Age upon which she undoubtedly left her stamp. The Stracheyan method seems unable to cope with the Elizabethan spirit. Subjecting her to the light of modern psychology brings her character into clearer focus, but the effect is slightly disgusting; it makes so definite the final surrender of Elizabethan to Bloomsbury England.[5]

Perhaps the outstanding quality of Strachey's method of characterization is his irony, but this is so

(1) "Elizabeth and Essex", p.15
(2) Ibid. p.91
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(4) The Bookman, July 1930, p.376
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It is as a man possessed by a religious mania that we see King Philip of Spain. His political intrigues with Elizabeth, for whom he was no match, enter in to a certain extent, but it is kneeling in prayer and "in anguish as he looked from his opera box upon the high altar"(3) that we remember him. Death-bed scenes, probably because of their high emotional appeal, fascinated Strachey and he handled them with skill. That of King Philip shows him at his best. "He was dying as he had lived, in absolute piety. His conscience was clear: he had always done his duty; he had been infinitely industrious; he had existed solely for virtue and the glory of God. One

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(2) The Bookman, February 1929, p.627
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(2) The Bookman, February 1929, p.527
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Queen Victoria and Lord Melbourne, Queen Victoria and Lord Palmerston, Queen Victoria and Sir Robert Peel all furnish interesting studies, but Queen Victoria and Disraeli as opposed to Gladstone offer possibilities that Strachey could not be expected to miss. First of all her feeling about Disraeli was unexpected. By all the laws of convention she should have favored Gladstone." He had been the disciple of her revered Peel, and had won the approval of Albert; Mr. Disraeli had hounded Sir Robert to his fall with hideous virulence, and the Prince

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had pronounced that he 'had not one single element of a gentleman in his composition'. Yet she regarded Mr. Gladstone with a distrust and dislike which steadily deepened, while upon his rival she lavished an abundance of confidence, esteem, and affection such as Lord Melbourne himself had hardly known." Mr. Disraeli had understood her grief at the death of Albert, and all his condolences had taken the form of eulogies of the departed. "The Prince", he said, "is the only person whom Mr. Disraeli has ever known who realized the Ideal. None with whom he is acquainted have ever approached it. There was in him an union of the manly grace and sublime simplicity, of chivalry with the intellectual splendour of the Attic Academe. The only character in English history that would, in some respects, draw near to him is Sir Philip Sidney: the same high tone, the same universal accomplishments, the same blended tenderness and vigour, the same rare combination of romantic energy and classic repose."(1) No wonder the Queen succumbed to his enchantments.

The friendship grew. Disraeli was now Prime Minister. His official letters became racy and written "in his best novel style". "In return for his interesting letters , she sent him, when the spring came, several bunches of flowers, picked by her own hands. He dis-

(1) "Queen Victoria", pp.327,328,329

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In the meantime, Mr. Gladstone could seem to make no headway. It was not only his policy that was unacceptable, but, "she disliked his personal demeanour toward herself."[2] It was not that he was lacking in courtesy or respect. He treated her with reverence, "as a sacrasanct embodiment of venerable traditions--a vital element in the British Constitution--a Queen by Act of Parliament."[3] He treated her like a much revered institution, and she wished to be treated like a woman. And so it was that Gladstone never got very far with the Queen.

Disraeli, with his uncanny ability to see beneath the surface and to seize the opportunity of advantage to himself, realized "the interacting complexities of circumstance and character, the pride of place mingled so inextricably with personal arrogance, the super-abundant emotionalism, the ingenuousness of outlook, the solid, the laborious respectability, shot through so incongru-

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He followed the courtly charlatan through his social and political machinations until the Prime Minister had "the Faery" completely in his power. " 'You have heard me called a flatterer', he said to Matthew Arnold', 'and it is true. Everyone likes flattery; and when you come to royalty you should lay it on with a trowel'. He practised what he preached."(1) Finally, however, "worn out with age and maladies but moving still, an assiduous mummy, from dinner-party to dinner-party, suddenly he moved no longer."(2) The Queen was much distressed and sent him some primroses accompanied by a note. "When the royal letter was given him, the strange old comedian stretched on his bed of death, poised it in his hand, appeared to consider it deeply, and whispered to those about him,'This ought to be read to me by a Privy Councillor.' "(3)

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lish public school were two of the idols which he was particularly anxious to break. He chose Dr. Arnold of Rugby as a suitable victim. Reverenced by his generation, this educator possessed religious convictions so orthodox that his own son became unable to accept them. The reorganization of the English public school was the dream of his life. Strachey could scarcely have found a subject more to his liking.

Very early in his career, young Arnold had doubts on important matters of doctrine: "The subject of thses distressing thoughts is that most awful one, on which all very inquisitive reasoning minds are, I believe, most liable to such temptations---I mean the doctrine of the blessed Trinity".(1) By following the advice of his friend Keble he received peace of mind. He had a great dislike of early rising. "This weakness too he overcame, yet not quite so successfully as his doubts upon the Trinity."(2)

Eton, at this time ruled by Dr. Keate, was a typical public school. "It was a system of anarchy tempered by despotism."(3) Dr. Arnold agreed that there should be a change, and started one when made master of Rugby. He instituted the government of the school by the Sixth Form boys and thus made a very radical step toward self-discipline." He introduced modern languages and mathema-

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The study of Greek and Latin remained the principal work of the boys. Dr. Arnold felt that the study of language "was given for the very purpose of forming the human mind in youth.....Certainly there was something providential about it---.....If Greek and Latin had not been given in that convenient manner, Dr. Arnold, who had spent his life in acquiring those languages, might have discovered that he had acquired them in vain."(2)

In an essay on "Pope", Strachey said that he was glad that he did not live in an age when "the little monster of Twit 'nam" was alive to wake up some morning and find himself "hanging by the neck" and "exposed to the ridicule of a polite world." It is easy to believe that many who read "Eminent Victorians" in 1918 thought that that was exactly the position in which he had placed Dr. Arnold and the other subjects of the book.(3) Mrs. Humphry Ward, his granddaughter, certainly felt that way when she wrote the following to "The London Times":

"I wonder if you will allow me to write a few words of protest against the praise---for the most part

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(3) Saturday Review of Literature, March 26, 1932,p614

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characters and raising them to a position of relative importance. Such types seemed to be especially adapted to his talent. Lady Hester Stanhope well illustrates[1] the point. The wanderings of this demented lady through the East, garbed in the costume of a Turkish gentleman, are fit subjects for entertaining ridicule. He begins unconventionally with the subject of Lady Hester's nose. It was the "Pitt nose" which had "lost its masculinity." "It was a nose of wild ambitions.....It was a nose, in fact, altogether in the air."[2] This introductory paragraph sets the tempo of the essay. The "amours" of the granddaughter of the Earl of Chatham lose nothing by suggestion. Her departure from England, the progress of her religious fanaticism, and her final settlement on the slopes of Mt. Lebanon where she remained until her death, all lend themselves to the ironical touch. At her death "the servants immediately possessed themselves of every movable object in the house. But Lady Hester cared no longer: she was lying back in her bed---inexplicable, grand, preposterous, with her nose in the air."[3]

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3. Use of historical background

"One does not go to Lytton Strachey for fact nor for the modern interpretation of historical phenomena but for literary delight," says Joseph Krutch.(1) That would seem to evaluate the importance that Strachey himself placed upon the historical background in his biographies, despite the fact that, for the most part, he chose for his main subjects characters that were essentially a part of the history of their day. His interest was in personality, and all else was subordinated to that. There is slight consideration given to the marvelous achievements of the Elizabethan Age in literature, the drama, or in the field of discovery, exploration, and settlement. The action centers about Elizabeth, the woman, in her dealings with her favourite, Essex. It is true we get a hint of England's relations with the rest of the world, but only incidentally to show some side of the Queen's personality. The reactions are always those of Elizabeth and not those of England. Andre Maurois thinks Strachey shows wisdom in this treatment, especially in the case of Queen Victoria. "Mr. Strachey has wisely made his book ('Queen Victoria') a personal portrait rather than a large historical picture. The influence of the Queen on English politics was certainly

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considerable, but she was only one amongst many other factors."[1] As E. G. Clark says, one must read Green or some other standard historian and not Strachey for a true picture of English history.[2]

Nowhere is this subordination of history to personality better seen than in the case of General Gordon.[3] "The End of General Gordon", as the article is called, suggests the disaster and Strachey has selected the telling facts that led up to the disaster with rare discernment, albeit, perhaps with the idea of exposing hitherto unknown facts, all the time skilfully weaving in the historical background. "Subtract from the statesman his policy, from the general his soldiership, from the artist his art, from the thinker his philosophy, and the result is the Man." So believed Strachey.

General Gordon was a great Puritan and a great soldier, and had been treated as a national saint. Cyril Robinson in his recent history "England" says of him: "Half religious eccentric, half military genius, Gordon had led a life of strange adventure in distant continents. He had commanded a native army for the Chinese Government, receiving the title of 'General' for his pains. He had explored the religious sites of Palestine; and, above all, for six years he had governed single-handed the Khedive's province of the south Sudan. Here was just

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Likewise, here was just the man with the proper combination of unusual characteristics to interest Strachey, Gordon went to Khartoum and tried to help the English situation in Egypt, but he himself was besieged there and, due to a long series of delays in England, was killed just two days before relief came. Such is the historical background against which this strange figure is placed.

Some critics feel that it was impossible for a sceptic like Strachey to understand a religious enthusiast like Gordon. In his youth the latter was a boy "full of high spirits, pluck, and love of mischief."[2] There were a few misdemeanors during his training period, and these Strachey does not fail to mention. His military career in China was deserving of high praise. Subsequently he would seem to have been almost neglected by the English Government for he received a minor appointment to supervise the erection of forts at the mouth of the Thames. "In his solitude, he ruminated upon the mysteries of the universe; and those religious tendencies, which had already shown themselves, now became a fixed and dominating factor in his life. His reading was confined almost entirely to the Bible; untiring, an unending assiduity."[3]

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"But the Holy Book was not his only solace. For now, under the parching African sun, we catch glimpses, for the first time, of Gordon's hand stretching out towards stimulants of a more material quality. For months together, we are told, he would drink nothing but pure water; and then.....water that was not so pure. In his fits of melancholy, he would shut himself up in his tent for days at a time, with a hatchet and a flag placed at the door to indicate that he was not to be disturbed for any reason whatever; until at last the cloud would lift, the signals would be removed, and the Governor would reappear, brisk and cheerful.....His eccentricities grew upon him.....While he jibed at his superiors, his subordinates learnt to dread the explosions of his wrath. There were moments when his passions became utterly ungovernable; and the gentle soldier of God, who had spent the day in quoting texts for the

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edification of his sister, would slap the face of his Arab aide-de-camp in a sudden access of fury, or set upon his Alsatian servant and kick him till he screamed."(1) Certainly a revelation to a generation that knew and approved of Queen Victoria's placing of the General's Bible in one of the corridors at Windsor, enclosed in a crystal case.

One suspects that Strachey was never a Liberal in politics or he would not have painted Lord Hartington, the War Minister, in the manner in which he did. "Above all, they loved him for being dull. It was the greatest comfort--with Lord Hartington they would always be absolutely certain that he would never, in any circumstances, be either brilliant or subtle, or surprising, or impassioned, or profound."(2) The Lord, however, felt responsible for Gordon's appointment to Khartoum against the wishes of Sir Evelyn Baring, the chief in command in the district. When no word came from the General, his conscience began to trouble him, and he felt that help should be sent. With rare skill, Strachey pictures the combination of circumstances, Lord Hartington's slowness, Gladstone's stubbornness, which resulted in the delay of the relief expedition until it was too late.

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And finally we see the General waiting in the besieged city, working with energy by day, writing his diary and reading his Bible by night. Then came days when "he spent long hours upon the palace roof gazing northwards; but the veil of mystery and silence was unbroken." (2) The city fell and the Arabs rushed in. "For a moment there was a deathly pause, while he stood in silence, surveying his antagonists." (3) One "plunged his spear into the Englishman's body" and "three other Dervishes instantly hacked him to death." (3) The relief expedition arrived two days later, but it was not until thirteen years later that Major Kitchener settled the Egyptian question. Then, "after which it was thought proper that a religious ceremony in honour of General Gordon should be held at the Palace of Khartoum. The service was conducted by four chaplains.....Everyone agreed that General Gordon had been avenged at last. Who could doubt it? General Gordon himself, possibly, fluttering, in some remote Nirvana, the pages of a phantasmal Bible, might have ventured on a satirical remark. But General

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The narrative, for the most part, runs true to the historical facts subordinated, but even here Strachey cannot refrain from making a good story at the expense of historical accuracy. In speaking of Lord Hartington he said that he had two ambitions, "to be Prime Minister and to win the Derby."(2) If my history is correct, it was Lord Rosebery who made this statement.

4. The treatment of incident

The ability to tell a story well is one of Mr. Strachey's talents, and "the hideous tragedy of Dr. Lopez"(3) furnishes an excellent opportunity to use them. It is an incident full of intrigue, treachery, and injustice, and is of sufficient complexity to require skilful handling.

Ruy Lopez was a Portuguese Jew who rose to the position of physician-in-chief to Queen Elizabeth." It was rumoured that he owed his advancement less to medical skill than flattery and self-advertisement; and in a libel-

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those were differences merely of degree; always, the fatal compulsion was there, inextricably confusing truth and falsehood. What shred of credibility could adhere to testimony obtained in such circumstances?"(1) Under the stress of such treatment, even the "Doctor, worn out at last by weeks of anxiety, suddenly collapsed"(2) and agreed that he had promised the Spaniards to murder the Queen.

The final satisfaction has all the horrors of a Gothic romance. The Doctor and his fellow conspirators in crime, bound to hurdles, were dragged up Holborn to Tyburn. There they were strung up and cut down while life was still in them and subjected to other mistreatment. Tinoco broke away, and the crowd enjoyed the sight of the unfortunate man falling upon his executioner. In vain---he was felled by a blow on the head, and then killed like the rest.

"Elizabeth was merciful to the Doctor's widow. She allowed her to keep the goods and chattels of the deceased, forfeited by his attainder---with one exception. She took possession of King Philip's ring. She slipped it--who knows with what ironical commiseration?---- on to her finger; and there it stayed till her death."(3)

One can always be sure of the structure of Strachey's work whether considering a book or an incident. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and the parts fit closely one into the other.

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5. The use of source material

The modern biographer taps a great many sources to get material for his writings. If the subject has written an autobiography, he investigates that; letters and diaries are carefully scrutinized; records of contemporaries and the opinions of his group or class furnish some information. In addition, all standard works that may be in existence on the life of the individual must be gone over.

An examination of the bibliographical material which Mr. Strachey presents to us in his major biographical works will disclose that he was familiar with all the standard and well-known books on the characters under discussion. Besides these, one finds scattered through his lists references such as the following:

Li Hung Chang - Memoirs
Greville - The Greville Memoirs
The Private Life of the Queen
The Notebooks of a Spinster Lady
Diaries of a Lady of Quality
Birch MSS. British Museum

These are but a few. Many more of a similar nature might be quoted.

It is not possible to go over a large number of references such as these because many are rare and valuable documents carefully kept in the British Museum. Mr. Strachey, however, did have access to them,,and consulted these letters, diaries, and memoirs for the mate-

Note: Standard references much quoted by Strachey in "Queen Victoria" are: Buckle's "Life of Benjamin Disraeli;" Martin's "The Life of His Royal Highness the Prince Consort;" Morley's "Life of William Ewart Gladstone."

6. The use of source material

The modern biographer taps a great many sources to get material for his writings. If the subject has written an autobiography, he investigates that; letters and diaries are carefully scrutinized; records of contemporaries and the opinions of his group or class furnish some information. In addition, all standard works that may be in existence on the life of the individual must be gone over.

An examination of the bibliographical material which Mr. Strachey presents to us in his major biographical works will disclose that he was familiar with all the standard and well-known books on the characters under discussion. Besides these, one finds scattered through his lists references such as the following:

Li Hung Chang - Memoirs
Greville - The Greville Memoirs
The Private Life of the Queen
The Notebooks of a Spinster Lady
Diaries of a Lady of Quality
Egerton MSS. British Museum

These are but a few. Many more of a similar nature might be quoted.

It is not possible to go over a large number of references such as these because many are rare and valuable documents carefully kept in the British Museum. Mr. Strachey, however, did have access to them, and consulted these letters, diaries, and memoirs for the mate-

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It is the fortunate generations that are homogeneous, spending their lives within the boundary of a single age. Charles Greville was a straddler, born in 1794 and died in 1865, thus living in the reigns of George the Fourth and Queen Victoria. The result was that he had no marked individuality and was neither a rebel nor a prophet. "He was amenable to the Time Spirit; and the fashionable young man who betted at White's and flirted at Almack's and who felt that his wildest dreams had come true when he was given the management of the Duke of York's racing stables became at last a grave, respectable personage in black with a conscience, a follower of Sir Robert Peel, and an admirer of the Prince Consort." He became cross in his old age possibly because he thought himself a failure, but he did one thing that kept him

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from this fate, he wrote a diary.

This diary filled ninety-one small quarto volumes and was published in three installments (1874 - 1885 - 1887) by Henry Reeves, a friend of Greville. Reeves put in everything except what would pain those living (scandalous stories), observations on the writer's private affairs, and reflections upon the character of the Queen. It was Strachey's comment that these omissions should also be published now, and some of his footnotes in "Queen Victoria" show that he had access to the unpublished sections and used them.(1)

The Victorians were horrified at the book when it appeared. Most of it was concerned with the author's own life, but the material was of a gossipy nature, and furnished a great mass of first-hand information about the Court. It was just what Strachey was looking for, and he made the most of it.

The nature of the diary may be gathered from these few selections as used by Strachey:

The Duke of York "had been long married to the Princess Royal of Prussia, a lady who rarely went to bed and was perpetually surrounded by vast numbers of dogs, parrots, and monkeys."(2)

The Duke of Clarence had as his mistress Mrs. Jordan, the actress. "He suddenly separated from her

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"The Duchess of Kent, Victoria's mother, had insisted that whenever her yacht appeared it should be received by royal salutes from all the men-of-war and all the forts. The King declared that these continual poppings must cease; the Premier and the First Lord of the Admiralty were consulted; and they wrote privately to the Duchess, begging her to waive her rights. But she would not hear of it.....Eventually the King, in a great state of excitement, issued a special Order in Council, prohibiting the firing of royal salutes to any ships except those which carried the reigning sovereign or his consort on board."(2)

The essay "Florence Nightingale" is a good example of Mr. Strachey's method when he uses a standard "Life" as the basis of his material. In the preface to "Eminent Victorians", he makes special reference to his chief source book. "A list of the principal sources from which I have drawn is appended to each Biography. I would indicate, as an honourable exception to the current commodity, Sir Edward Cook's excellent 'Life of Florence Nightingale', without which my own study, though

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composed on a very different scale and from a decidedly different angle, could not have been written."

In general, it has been said that Strachey's method was "to take the facts from an admiring previous biography and pump in an atmosphere of his own making which had the curious effect of taking whole cubits off the stature of the distinguished person around whom the atmosphere was shed."(1)

One of the persons most aroused by the picture of Florence Nightingale in "Eminent Victorians" was Mrs. Rosalind Nash. She knew both Miss Nightingale and her parents and was able to give first-hand information to Sir Edward Cook himself. In the preface Strachey had said that the biographer should exclude the redundant and the insignificant, but he tells us that the future nurse "put her dog's wounded paw into elaborate splints as if it was a human being."(2) Mrs. Nash questions the significance of this statement and goes farther by saying it is not even accurate. Florence merely used "hot water fomentations."(3) She thinks that Strachey probably put this item in to show the "mania" for healing.

Much of the "local colour" of the Nightingale home life Strachey applied himself. "It was very odd; what could be the matter with dear Flo? Mr. Nightingale suggested that a husband might be advisable."(4) The truth

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was that it was Mrs. Nightingale that was the matchmaker. An unimportant matter, but why bring it in, asks Mrs. Nash, if not correctly?[1]

There is constant reference made to Florence as a demon of frenzy with a furious driving temper. "She had the gift of calm, "says her friend", and"did not need to resort to such methods."[2] She may have been inconsiderate to her fellow-workers at times, but she was scarcely the tigress and the demon of energy that Strachey paints her. He heightens the portrait. "The woman who has been made a plaster saint is to be shown without regard to mere evidence as possessed by a demon of rage and fury, which is done partly by a pretty selection of epithets chosen at will, and partly, as I have shown, by rewriting passages of the original which are not spicy enough."[3]

Mrs. Nash compares Strachey's work to that of the "Writer-up" employed by some newspapers. He receives a meager and matter-of-fact telegram about a murder or a battle, and he enriches it with colourful detail.[4]

As an example of this technique, we may consider this incident in the life of Miss Nightingale. She was a very elderly lady when she was presented with the order of Merit. Sir Edward Cook describes it:[5]

"Sir Douglas Dawson, on the King's behalf,

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(3) Ibid., p.262
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(2) Ibid., p.253
(3) Ibid., p.252
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brought the Order (of Merit) .....to South Street. Miss Nightingale understood that some kindness had been done to her, but hardly more. 'Too kind, too kind', she said."

As "written up" by Strachey:

"Then by Royal command, the Order of Merit was brought to South Street, and there was a little ceremony of presentation. Sir Douglas Dawson, after a short speech, stepped forward, and handed the insignia of the Order to Miss Nightingale. Propped up by pillows, she dimly recognised that some compliment was being paid her. 'Too kind --too kind', she murmured; and she was not ironical." (1)

Mrs. Nash assures us that Strachey added as many mistakes as words. She says: "There was no 'little ceremony'. Sir Douglas Dawson did not make a speech, short or long, did not step forward, and did not hand the insignia of the Order to Miss Nightingale. On the contrary, he stayed downstairs with members of Miss Nightingale's family while the Order was taken to her by one of her cousins and her private secretary." Such are the pitfalls awaiting the vivid and voracious "writer up." (2)

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6. Irony as a dominant trait in Strachey's writings

The outstanding characteristic of Strachey's writings is irony. It has been difficult up to this point to treat of his other characteristics apart from his irony because that quality is so essentially Strachey. G. K. Chesterton felt that nothing would ever dissipate into dust its diamond-like nature.(1) He applies it with an air of detachment into which he himself does not enter. He walks behind his characters, imitates their gestures, remains serious, and thus makes a sort of fun with which it is impossible to cope.(2) Yet it is debatable just how much real detachment there was in this technique. The essay on Cardinal Manning is not the work of one who had a really impersonal feeling toward his subject. This character is certainly "served up in a sauce of piquant malice."(3) It is an "angry" essay and has "the force of suppressed invective." One feels that Strachey, perhaps, did not realize how much of his real antipathy he was showing. Then, again, perhaps he did, for it is noticeable that not again after 1918, with one or two exceptions, did his irony have the rapier-like quality that it showed in "Eminent Victorians". Here "he satirized the atmosphere of an entire period by dissecting with a species of coolly detached intellectual surgery the reputations of its celebrities."(4) and by "using irony so acid

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It would be necessary to quote the entire article on Manning to give a complete picture of its ironical tendencies. There is scarcely a sincere sentence in its whole one-hundred thirty pages. As this is impractical, perhaps a few illustrations will serve the purpose.

Here, too, as in the case of General Gordon, the sceptic, Strachey, was dealing with a character he was unable to appreciate. In the introduction, while wondering at the Cardinal's success in the scientific Nineteenth Century, he asks the question: "Or, on the other hand, was it he who had been supple and yielding? he who had won by art what he would never have won by force, and who had managed, so to speak, to be one of the leaders of the procession less through merit than through a superior faculty for gliding adroitly to the front rank?"(1)

Manning's people had been well-to-do, but it was not until his father was forced into bankruptcy that the young man considered taking orders in the English Church, more as a matter of expediency than from any really deep religious motives.(2) After receiving an appointment as assistant to a rector, he married. Not long after, his wife died. "When Mrs. Manning prematurely died,

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Early in the story, Newman, who is used as the foil throughout, makes his appearance. Strachey takes pleasure in considering what his fate might have been had he gone to Cambridge instead of to Oxford. Knowing Cambridge and his own cast of mind, it is an interesting consideration, especially when we are told that there had been no decision made until "the gig came round on the fatal morning.....who can doubt that the Oxford Movement would have flickered out its little flame unobserved in the Common Room of Oriel?" and Newman "might have helped to weave the garland of Meleager, or to mix the 'lapis lazuli' of Fra Angelico, or to chase the delicate truth in the shade of an Athenian 'palaestra'.....At Oxford he was doomed."(2)

Referring to the purposes of the Tractarian Movement, he remarks: "No, the waters of the true Faith had dived underground at the Reformation, and they were waiting for the wand of Newman to strike the rock before they should burst forth once more into the light of day. The whole matter, no doubt, was Providential---what other explanation could there be?"(3)

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Manning was attracted to Newman's ideas: "There was also an element in his mind.....which now brought him under the spell of the Oxford theories of sacramental mysticism. And besides, the Movement offered another attraction; it imputed an extraordinary, a transcendent merit to the profession which Manning himself pursued."(1) But he did not wish it to be generally known that he was interested. "It was necessary to be careful, and Manning was very careful indeed."(2)

Before Newman finally became a Roman Catholic, he visited many shrines venerated by the members of that faith. "When Newman was a child he 'wished that he could believe the Arabian Nights were true.' When he came to be a man, his wish seems to have been granted."(3)

Not all of those connected with the Movement, joined Newman. "On the other hand, Keble and Pusey continued for the rest of their lives to dance in an exemplary manner upon the tight-rope of High Anglicanism; in such an exemplary manner, indeed, that the tight-rope has its dancers still."(4)

"When Manning joined the Church of Rome he acted under the combined impulse of the two dominating forces in his nature"(5) --- his interest in the supernatural and his interest in himself. "The Church of England is a commodious institution; she is very anxious to please; but, somehow or other, she has never managed to

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Strachey feels that Manning saw material gains for himself in his conversion, and is much hurt because a conversation that the Cardinal had with Pius IX previous to this time was never published. "What did Pio Nino say? It is easy to imagine the persuasive innocence of his Italian voice. 'Ah, dear Signor Manning, why don't you come over to us? Do you suppose that we should not look after you?"[2] A typical Stracheyesque imagination.

Both Newman and Manning became cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church. The death of the former preceded that of the latter by several years. "The Cardinal's memory is a dim thing today. And he who descends into the crypt of that Cathedral which Manning never lived to see, will observe, in the quiet niche with the sepulchral monument, that the dust lies thick on the strange, the incongruous, the almost impossible object which, with its elaborations of dependent tassels, hangs down from the dim vault like some forlorn and forgotten trophy---the Hat."[3] Scarcely the product of a detached and impersonal point of view.

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7. The French influence in his writings

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A few years later, the editor of the Home University Library was looking for an author to get together a book on French literature. Many well-known writers were suggested, but the editor's friend, Mr. H. A. L. Fischer, remembering the article on Miss Lee's work, suggested Mr. Strachey, an unknown, who was then but a few years out of Cambridge. He tells of his interview with Strachey:

He was a sensitive, ungainly youth, awkward in bearing, and with an appearance of great physical debility...His voice was faint and squeaky; he had little to say but was uncannily quick in comprehending what was wanted. The result of this interview was "Landmarks in French Literature", a splendid achievement for so young a man.(1)

(1) Saturday Review of Literature, March 26, 1932, p.613

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In 1903 there appeared in the "Independent Review" a notice of Miss Elizabeth Lee's translation of Vauvenargues. The article was signed "Lytton Strachey." It showed a rare knowledge of French literature, the type of work one would expect from the well-educated son of a refined French mother. The writer was able to take the translation and compare it with the original to bring out the shades of meaning, something that required a deep knowledge of the French language.

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He was a sensitive, ungainly youth, awkward in bearing, and with an appearance of great physical debility...His voice was faint and squeaky; he had little to say but was uncannily quick in comprehending what was wanted. The result of this interview was "Landmarks in French Literature", a splendid achievement for so young a man.(1)

(1) Saturday Review of Literature, March 26, 1932, p.613

The book showed a complete knowledge of French literature. He had read everything and knew what he liked; hence the book is a criticism as well as a summary. He begins briefly with the origins, the "Chansons de Geste" and the "Chanson de Roland", and goes on to "Le Roman de la Rose" and the individual authors of the Middle Ages, giving in each case not only the facts, but his views. "Jean de Meung was not a great artist; he wrote without distinction, and without sense of form; it is his bold and voluminous thought that gives him a place in French literature."(1)

In these clear-cut and smooth-flowing sentences he characterizes the Age of Louis XIV: "The literature of those days was founded on a general acceptance -- acceptance both in the sphere of politics and of philosophy. It took for granted a fixed and autocratic society; it silently assumed the orthodox teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, compared with the literature of the eighteenth century it was unspeculative; compared with that of the Middle Ages, unspiritual."(2)

His own deep interests can be suspected from the fact that he devotes more than half of the book to the "Age of Louis XIV" and "The Eighteenth Century." True these were the great periods of France's glory in every field, but such emphasis is a keynote to the pas-

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He sums up in three sentences the politics of this century and then says of the literature: "Thus the literature of the epoch offers a singular contrast to that of the preceding one.....The former were static, the latter dynamic. As the century progressed, the tendency deepened; and the literature of the age, taken as a whole, presents a spectacle of thrilling dramatic interest, in which the forces of change, at first insignificant, gradually gather in volume, and at last, accumulated into overwhelming power, carry all before them. In pure literature, the writers of the eighteenth century achieved, indeed many triumphs; but their great, their peculiar, triumphs were in the domain of thought."(1)

" 'Landmarks in French Literature' is a gem. The distribution of matter is so well balanced, the few quotations are so appropriate, and representative, his comprehensive sympathy for the complex genius of France is so thorough that it may be put up as a model of this sort of writing."(2)

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(1) Saturday Review of Literature, Feb. 6, 1932, p.502
(2) The Living Age, July 21, 1923, p.127

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Strachey was not only a biographer but also, as we have seen, a critic, and he was a critic before he was a biographer. That would appear as one of the best indications that he was influenced by the French. Criticism is a quality of the French literary mind, and keen critical ability was one of Strachey's talents. Lawrence Gilman in "The North American Review" says: "Strachey is the lucky Fiddler of criticism. He has two strings to his bow--biography and literary criticism..... He has that priceless faculty in a critic--the faculty of taking an old and much photographed subject and so placing it before the lens as to produce a wholly new set of contours and surfaces and expressions, so that we see the long-familiar face, the well-known turn of the neck, and the pose of the body in a fresh and engrossing light."(2)

"Books and Characters" shows the French influence about as well as any of his writings. In the first place, eight of the fifteen subjects under discussion are

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The article on Racine was occasioned by a criticism by Mr. John Bailey in a volume of essays entitled "The Claims of French poetry." (1) Racine was one of Strachey's passions, and he took up Mr. Bailey point by point and answered him." For, to a lover of Racine, the fact that English critics of Mr. Bailey's calibre can write of him as they do, brings a feeling not only of entire disagreement, but of almost personal distress." (2)

Mr. Bailey was being dealt with by a young man---he was then twenty-eight---who knew his Racine, and this essay is "probably the most finely discerning interpretation of his (Racine's) work in English criticism." (3)

According to Lloyd Morris, the method used in this book is the classical one of "selection, omission, and unification with the object of creating a central impression of supreme reality." The virtue of "Books and Characters" lies in the fact that it not only recreates three dimensional characters but also their "mileu," culture, and society in one impression. It

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(3) The Outlook, Aug. 23, 1922, p.681

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(3) The Outlook, Aug. 23, 1922, p.383

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Very similar in form is his other book of criticism compiled from his papers hither to unpublished in book form by his brother and published in 1933. It is called "Characters and Commentaries." The title is suggestive of "Books and Characters" and the tone is very much the same. The former, however, covers a wider range of subject matter and deals with a much larger proportion of English literary lights. For example, there is a section devoted to the "English Letter Writers", Pope, Walpole, Chesterfield, Gray, Byron, etc. Then we read about "Mr. Hardy's New Poems" and "A Victorian Critic." Some French characters are discussed, but one also sees such titles as "A Russian Humorist", "A Diplomatist; Li-Hung-Chang" to prove that Mr. Strachey's interests are broadening. Almost everything that has been said of "Books and Characters" is equally applicable to the second book which is chiefly valuable---outside of its entertaining contents-as a reflector of the author's personal evolution in the field of letters. Even his earliest writings show the polished style, keen critical appreciation, and

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the flare for the exotic, but it is not until he is older that the sharpness of his irony is fully developed.

8. Strachey's style

No matter what has been said by the critics for and against Strachey's method and material---and, as we shall see, much has been said on both sides---I have yet to find one adverse criticism of his style. All concede that it is brilliant and sustained throughout in a witty, subtle, and detached manner. The perfectly balanced sentence and the unforgettable "mot juste" show him to be a master of English prose style.(1)

Such smooth flowing sentences were not the product of chance. "That delicate irony, that lightness of touch, that effortless flow of narrative are not things that can be reproduced to order every Spring or Autumn season", says Wingfield-Stratford.(2) One critic remarks that Strachey might have spent some of the time he used polishing his paragraphs in being more accurate about some of his factual details. But he admits that the paragraphs are polished. Strachey thought a great deal about what he was going to write and still more about how he was going to write it. He perfected whole sentences and paragraphs in his head, and his pages show few corrections.(3) He was a sincere workman, patient and

(1) "Some Modern Authors", pp.182-196
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His interest in the eighteenth century, as well as his complete knowledge of French literature, is given the credit for his perfection of style." His was an old time model. His spirit was not of the twentieth but of the eighteenth century, and indeed the balanced and lucid intellectuality of his style is more reminiscent of Voltaire than of any English writer of that time."(2)

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D. Strachey and the Critics

During the fourteen years that Strachey was publishing his works, he was an object of interest to the critics. "Landmarks in French Literature" being in the nature of literary criticism had caused very little discussion, excellent though it was, except among those acquainted with the French authors. From 1918 on, however, it was an entirely different story. His biographical method was new to the English reading public, the style was pleasing, and the subject matter was entertaining. It appealed to the appetities of many Post-War readers.

Not all of those who read, however, were willing to give their approval, and many of the leading newspapers of 1918 had much adverse criticism of this "bitter brilliant Briton" as he was called. Lord Esher in "The Morning Post" expresses his opinion in no uncertain terms:

"At this moment many old beliefs and hopes are shattered. May we not leave the destruction of sacred memories to the enemies of our country, and refrain from chipping, however brilliantly the chisel may be handled, the marble in which our national heroes are enshrined?..... The modern style of presenting the nobler figures of history requires that we should remember Florence Nightingale as an ill-tempered, importunate spinster, who

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drove a statesman to his death, and as a senile invalid, decorated ludicrously by Sir Douglas Dawson, rather than in the guise of the devoted nurse who stands within a few yards of the dignified statue of Sidney Herbert in Pall Mall. Arthur Clough, the delicate poet, the prototype of 'Thyrsis', and the 'Scholar Gypsy', is by his latest delineator drawn as an anemic tier-up of parcels for a cross-grained old woman."(1)

"The Guardian" turns the tables completely on Strachey:

"And yet -- and yet! Manning did preach the Gospel to the poor; Miss Nightingale did create modern nursing; Arnold did reform our public schools; and Gordon was a burning and a shining light in which we rejoiced for a season. Nor are they forgotten. We may rise from 'Eminent Victorians' with the saying of the Son of Sirrah, 'Let us now praise famous men.' "(2)

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"The Tablet" analyzes Strachey's method in this manner:

"He shows the great men of the Victorian Age as if he were showing moths or beetles with quaint mark-

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Gilbert K. Chesterton writing in "The New York Sun" says that Strachey looks at the nineteenth century from the outside but with an eighteenth century rather than a twentieth century point of view. His wit is keen and delicate. "He is perfect in pricking bubbles; but he sometimes mistakes for bubbles what are in fact worlds:

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it is an easy mistake to make."

He continues: "I shall not complain that he takes some of the stiffness, not to say the stuffing out of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, but he writes of the age of Gordon too much in the tone of Gibbon: and about Newman he is, I think, really wrong. He exhibits a form of narrowness I always feel in the sceptic; not that he cannot believe in belief. I do not mean that he questions Newman's sincerity, but that he questions about it. The sceptic is puzzled by it and is always trying to explain it---that is, to explain it away."(1)

As each of Strachey's other books was published, it aroused comment, but as his ironical touch became lighter, especially in "Queen Victoria", and as his subjects began to be drawn from an earlier century, the feeling of a personal affront seemed to leave the critics, and they began to consider the books from the point of view of their real literary merit.

Raymond Mortimer in speaking of the quality of the work says that it "has some relation to a voice that is never too loud, a scepticism that remains polite, a learning that is never paraded, and a disregard, that never becomes insulting, for the public taste. It is a quality of inherited culture. Genius and taste can only come to terms by something approaching a miracle. In

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Strachey it has happened."[1]

There were many attempts to appraise his work following his death in 1932. It was looked upon as a whole, perhaps, for the first time. Joseph Krutch, after analyzing his method in "The Nation" would seem to make a fair summary:

"One may be sure that there will be no windiness or absurdity, no extravagance and no folly. One may be sure also that one will find said all that shrewdness, wit, and cultivated common sense can say. There will be a beginning, a middle, and an end, and no loose threads left dangling."[2]

E. Strachey's Influence in the Field of Biography

Influence is of two kinds, immediate and lasting. In considering the literary influence of a man who has been dead but two years it is only of the immediate that we can speak with any assurance. The permanent results of his work cannot be determined for a long time.

Few authors influenced writers in their field as quickly as Strachey did, because what he had done looked so easy. No sooner did it appear that characters, hitherto reverenced, were found through letters, diaries, and other similar writings to have had many and very hu-

(1) The Bookman, Feb. 1929, p.629
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man faults than the letters and diaries of other prominent characters were investigated, and the work of the "debunkers" was started.

There is little or no comparison between the work of Strachey and that of some of his imitators, and even the best of them "has" never "quite learned to bend his master's bow." His learning, culture, and leisure produced qualities that they have been unable to capture. They lack his air of detachment, or his insight into the patterns and idiosyncrasies of character, his narrative skill, his eye for significant detail or his charm of style with its ease, lucidity, and irony. They lack some or all of these qualities, with the result that the work of many of them is not worthy of comparison with the model which they are copying.(1)

It is interesting to note that about the time that Strachey began publishing his biographies, Andre Maurois in France and Emil Ludwig in Germany were beginning to produce similar works in their own languages. "Ariel" and "Disraeli" by Maurois and "Napoleon" by Ludwig are examples of their style based upon the same eighteenth century French authors that Strachey used as a pattern. Even Maurois may owe something to his English friend in the way of example in so far as we may judge from his date of publication. America was not

(1) Saturday Review of Literature, July 18, 1931, p.971

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patterns and idiosyncrasies of character, his narrative
skill, his eye for significant detail or his charm of
style with its ease, lucidity, and irony. They lack
some or all of these qualities, with the result that the
work of many of them is not worthy of comparison with
the model which they are copying.(1)

It is interesting to note that about the time
that Strachey began publishing his biographies, Andre
Maurois in France and Emil Ludwig in Germany were begin-
ning to produce similar works in their own languages.
"Ariel" and "Disraeli" by Maurois and "Napoleon" by Lud-
wig are examples of their style based upon the same
eighteenth century French authors that Strachey used
as a pattern. Even Maurois may owe something to his
English friend in the way of example in so far as we
may judge from his date of publication. Ariel was not

(1) Saturday Review of Literature, July 18, 1931, p.971

slow in following the European writers. Washington, Lincoln, and most of the other great characters have been subjected to a "debunking" process which has had few of the good qualities and most of the faults of the Old World types.

Of Strachey's influence we can say little more. Claude W. Fuess, a leading American educator and biographer, agrees that his place in literary history is not yet known. He believes his work to be less ephemeral than that of Maurois and Ludwig, and more valuable than that of his well-known English followers, Harold Nicolson and Philip Guedalla. He is of the opinion that his fame is permanent. If some of his imitators have carried his method to excess and have cared more for vividness than for accuracy, it is not his fault. "His standards were high, his scholarship was scrupulous, and his style was a delight. For these finely-blended virtues we ought to offer grateful thanks and remember his name for more than a fleeting day."(1)

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SUMMARY

The twentieth century has shown an unusual interest in biography due in part to man's age old interest in his fellow-man and in part to a sceptical tendency in the age itself which has produced biographies written in a manner that has appealed to the popular taste. Those of ancient and mediaeval times were panegyric in style, and from them it was impossible to get a true picture of the individual. The modern biography aims to portray personality and to tell the facts as they are.

The biographer must first choose a good subject, then become saturated with information about it, and finally select the facts that will best give a true impression of the character. It is in this selection and in the placing of the emphasis that the so-called "new" biography differs from the "old". The former has a tendency to select and emphasize the elements in which the individual departs from the accepted "mores" of his day; the latter raised up individuals to be emulated.

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Giles Lytton Strachey of the modern school of biography came from a cultured English family. He was educated at Cambridge and devoted his life to literature.

His particular interests were in biography and criticism.

He startled the English reading public in 1918 by publishing under the title "Eminent Victorians" essays depicting the characters of Cardinal Manning, Dr. Arnold, Florence Nightingale, and General Gordon. Through the use of letters, diaries, and other intimate literary material, he aimed to get at the motives and probe into the mental attitudes of these people. The result was a book that presented them in a garb that was scarcely recognizable according to previous conceptions of their characters. He employed the same methods, slightly softened, later in the case of Queen Victoria, and in 1928 with Queen Elizabeth in "Elizabeth and Essex". His technique was similar to that of the novelist, and his ironical touch was of a quality that has never been even approached by his imitators.

Strachey's method seems most like the eighteenth century French writers with a leaning toward Voltaire. He was a keen student of French literature as is evidenced by his first book "Landmarks in French Literature" and by the large number of French characters he chose for his sketches. This thorough knowledge may account as well for his brilliant critical ability apparent in "Books and Characters", "Portraits in Miniature", and "Characters and Commentaries", published posthumously

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